



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

FOUNDER OF INTERNATIONAL CHECKERS HALL OF FAME PLEADS GUILTY TO MONEY LAUNDERING

-- Suspect attempted to transfer property deeds for purported drug proceeds --

PETAL, Miss. — Following a six-month investigation led by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, Dunn Lampton, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi and Michael A. Holt, ICE Special Agent in Charge, New Orleans, La., announced today that Charles Walker pleaded guilty late yesterday to a bill of information charging him with Federal money laundering violations.

Walker, 70, a former Mississippi state checkers champion who in 1976 founded the International Checker Hall of Fame in Petal, Miss., was arrested Jan. 7, 2005 by ICE agents at a motor home in a Wal-Mart parking lot in Gulfport, Miss.

At the time of his arrest, he was attempting to transfer property deeds for cash, purported to be drug smuggling proceeds. During the course of the investigation, an ICE undercover agent conducted several consensually monitored telephone calls and meetings with Walker discussing his willingness to launder \$6 million in represented drug smuggling proceeds.

To conceal and disguise the origin of the money, Walker created fictitious contracts that said that the undercover agent worked for him as a consultant for one of Walker's "paper companies" and would then pay the undercover agent with the agents' money, minus a 10 percent fee. Walker laundered \$100,000 through his personal account and through business accounts for the International Checker Hall of Fame and the International Christian Church.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Jay Goldin filed a Bill of Information in the Southern District of Mississippi charging Walker with Money Laundering. On June 29, Walker pleaded guilty to the charge and forfeited three pieces of real property used to facilitate the crime.

"This operation combined the best investigative techniques of ICE, and joint state and local law enforcement agencies to dismantle this money laundering operation," said Michael A. Holt, special-

agent-in-charge in New Orleans. “Those who pursue such illicit activities should think twice. We are committed to identifying money launderers and to ensuring that they are brought to justice.” Holt heads a five-state area, which includes: Louisiana, Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi and Tennessee.

Sentencing for Walker is set for Sept. 29. He faces up to 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

ICE agents in New Orleans, La.; Gulfport, Miss., and Mobile, Ala., conducted the joint investigation with assistance from the Internal Revenue Service, U.S. Postal Service and Gulfport Police Department.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.